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Environment and sustainable development: further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Letter dated 10 November 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Cape Verde to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the final report of the Regional Preparatory Meeting of the Small Island Developing States of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Seas to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Praia from 1 to 5 September 2003 (see annex). On behalf of the participating island countries, I request that the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly under agenda item 94 (d).

(*Signed*) Luis **da Fonseca**
Ambassador

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Annex to the letter dated 10 November 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Cape Verde to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Report of the Regional Preparatory Meeting of the Small Island Developing States of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Seas to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Introduction

1. The AIMS Regional Meeting for the Review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (BPOA) was held in Praia, Cape Verde 1-5 September 2003.

2. It was organized by the Small Island Developing States Unit of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and hosted by the Government of Cape Verde, with generous support from the Governments of Denmark, New Zealand and the Netherlands.

3. The meeting was opened by Her Excellency The Honourable Maria de Fatima Lima Veiga, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Communities of Cape Verde. A keynote address was delivered by the Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States, His Excellency Ambassador Jagdish Koonjul. The meeting elected His Excellency Ambassador Luis Fonseca of Cape Verde as Chairman, and Mr. Satecaved Seebaluck of Mauritius as Facilitator.

4. The following AIMS Island Countries were represented: Cape Verde, Comoros, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Seychelles and Singapore. Cyprus, Guinea-Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe were unable to attend the meeting.

5. Germany and Portugal attended the meeting in an observer capacity.

6. The following international, regional and national organizations were represented: AOSIS, UN DESA, the Small Island Developing States Information Network (SIDSNet), the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Indian Ocean Commission, Agence Internationale de la Francophonie, the University of the West Indies Center for Environment and Development, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Global Forum on Oceans, Coasts and Islands (University of Delaware), Convention to Combat Desertification Secretariat, and numerous NGOs from Cape Verde.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

7. The meeting heard comprehensive presentations on national assessment reports, where complete, and overview presentations where reports were yet to be completed, describing achievements on sustainable development in the AIMS region, continuing challenges to the implementation of the BPOA and new and emerging issues. The meeting also explored ways and means to improve regional cooperation. Delegates considered specific constraints for the AIMS group not shared by the other regional groups of AOSIS. They acknowledged the diversity of the region, characterized by geographic dispersion and differences in levels of development, and reflected in varying degrees of implementation of the BPOA in the region.

8. The meeting congratulated the Governments of Cyprus and Malta on the progress of their accession to the European Union and invited them to consider the inclusion of SIDS projects in their future development assistance portfolios.

9. The meeting received an update on progress with the UNEP GEO project, and it was agreed that the booklet for the region would be renamed the Atlantic and Indian Ocean SIDS Report. The meeting also received information on UNESCO's intersectoral Barbados +10 website, Small Islands Voice project and Forward-looking initiative.

10. The meeting engaged in an in-depth discussion on the vulnerability of SIDS. Consideration of the perspectives and issues regarding vulnerability as well as proposals for building resilience was led by a specially invited panel of experts.

11. The delegates acknowledged the support to be forthcoming from UNDP, UNEP and the Commonwealth Secretariat for completion of the National Assessment Reports, and also acknowledged the offers of support presented by international and regional organizations at the meeting. The delegates also expressed their gratitude to the Government and People of Cape Verde for the fine arrangements and warm hospitality.

Achievements and continuing challenges to the implementation of the BPOA in the AIMS region

12. The meeting recorded that the AIMS SIDS had attained varying levels of achievement in the implementation of the BPOA. Great efforts have been made at the national level. However, the committed level of international support did not materialize, which further impeded the implementation of the BPOA. The meeting therefore decided that the outcome of the International Meeting in Mauritius should be a focused plan of implementation, which also identifies the means for such implementation in addition to a political declaration.

13. National legislation in some countries has sought to incorporate or introduce integrated approaches to development, with a view to conserving and manageing the natural resource base of the islands, in particular coastal zones and marine resources,

considering that the SIDS are the custodians of very significant ocean space. Most countries have established national sustainable development monitoring or implementation mechanisms, many at high levels of decision making. Nevertheless, much work needs to be done in achieving an integrated approach to policy preparation and decision making.

14. During consideration of the national assessment reports it was observed that some AIMS SIDS were making efforts to link the implementation of the BPOA with the MDGs. AIMS SIDS were encouraged to continue establishing the appropriate linkages.

15. The AIMS SIDS reported progress in the ratification of relevant instruments, including relevant MEAs, and efforts to integrate their mandates into national sustainable development strategies.

16. The meeting acknowledged the efforts made in the region to involve all stakeholders, including the private sector, in the implementation of sustainable development policies and measures.

17. National development strategies have become informed by sustainable development priorities in some sectors, such as land use planning.

18. The development of climate change action plans and the identification of most vulnerable sites have continued in the region, with some countries progressing to implementation measures, in particular adaptation. All countries in the region have submitted their initial national communications to the UN FCCC. In view of the increasing risk of the adverse effects of climate change on the AIMS region, the meeting underscored the added urgency for the international community to ratify and fully implement the Kyoto Protocol and the need to take further action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support adaptation measures in SIDS.

19. Some countries have established national early warning systems and disaster mitigation plans, including national and regional oil spill contingency plans. However, national capacity is unlikely to be able to cope with the growing frequency of extreme weather events, and the costs associated with rehabilitation, in spite of the existence of special funds in some countries. In this regard the meeting called for further international assistance in the development of national disaster mitigation preparedness capacity and the creation of appropriate insurance and re-insurance schemes for SIDS.

20. While some countries have made significant progress in both planning and implementation of waste management policies and programs, most countries have serious difficulties in terms of financial and technical capacity in dealing with waste management issues. This is further compounded by the lack of available space for storage and disposal. There is a need for the introduction of technology for waste management strategies based on waste minimization, recycling and reuse, appropriate

to the scale of SIDS. The integration of waste management with the energy sector and the water and sanitation sector could provide significant cost savings in SIDS, while also conserving scarce natural resources and producing clean energy. The meeting called for international support for the development and implementation of technologies appropriate to SIDS that would provide for such integrated approaches.

21. All SIDS in the region have ratified the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea and UNEP regional seas conventions and the action plans in their sub-regions. The fisheries sector continues to be a significant foreign income earner for many of the AIMS SIDS. Several of these countries have also ratified the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement. However, the meeting highlighted that implementation continues to be impeded by financial constraints and a lack of capacity. It also expressed concern regarding the continuing challenges inherent in existing international legislative frameworks and mechanisms. Specific concerns were raised regarding Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing, and the monitoring and surveillance of the countries' respective EEZs, the area within their jurisdiction the management of which SIDS continue to seek regional and international cooperation, in accordance with the UNCLOS. The meeting also recorded difficulties encountered in relation to the monitoring and assessment of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks. In this connection existing regional fisheries management mechanisms in the AIMS region were recommended to be strengthened, and developed where appropriate, to support AIMS SIDS in their efforts to conserve and manage this valuable resource. The meeting expressed the need for further assistance from international community in this endeavor and also in the development and implementation of surveillance and monitoring systems, and with the necessary tools to analyze and assess the status of fish stocks.

22. Although some countries in the region have initiated integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) policies and regulations, the meeting agreed that these need to be further developed and fully implemented, and introduced where they do not exist. In this respect, the need to establish and strengthen appropriate national regulatory enforcement authorities was highlighted. Important aspects of ICZM identified included addressing beach erosion, sand mining and coral reef conservation and protection, so vital to the survival of the islands. A further challenge is the control of land-based sources of pollution, which must be integrated into the coastal zone management policies.

23. All AIMS SIDS continue to face water management challenges, caused in part by deficiencies in water availability, water catchment and storage, and leakage in the delivery system. Improved use of rainwater harvesting, water conservation and the introduction of innovative technologies to reclaim water has reduced this deficiency. However, increased supply will not be sufficient to address the water problems of the AIMS SIDS unless appropriate institutional strengthening and management techniques are introduced and implemented. It was noted that in certain SIDS in the region these measures were being implemented, through national water management plans.

24. It was recorded that many of the AIMS SIDS suffer from acute water problems, land degradation and desertification. In this regard it was also noted that many AIMS SIDS have achieved progress in their implementation of the main UNCED conventions. Nonetheless, there have been too few presentations of proposal for funding under the UNCCD and CBD by some AIMS SIDS. It is important for SIDS to maximize their access to available resources under the UNCCD and CBD. Noting the designation of the GEF as a financial Mechanism of the UNCCD, AIM SIDS welcome the opportunity to access GEF financial and technical resources to develop and implement projects to address land degradation, while calling for additional resources to enable them to complete their National Action Programmes (NAP). It was also noted that there was need for an integrated approach toward addressing the vulnerabilities of SIDS. The meeting therefore called for integrated action to combat desertification, climate change and other global environmental crises.

25. In many SIDS there is a need for land-use databases, to assist in sustainable development planning. Some AIMS SIDS have already developed these in relation to their national development strategies but most are impeded by a lack of financial and technical resources, and by inadequate training and access to remote sensing data. The challenge of reconciling competing land-use interests will require the integration of land-use priorities and policies in national development planning.

26. In many AIMS SIDS poor agricultural practices and weak watershed management have led to serious land degradation, which has also impacted on coastal zones and coral reefs. The meeting recommended that appropriate mechanisms be established at the national and regional levels to strengthen local capacities for improving watershed management and agricultural practices, including fertilizer application and pest management appropriate to SIDS circumstances.

27. Energy costs severely impact the economic and social circumstances of the AIMS SIDS and impede their development efforts. The high cost of dependence on fossil fuel has motivated AIMS SIDS to develop alternate sources of energy, and to pursue energy efficiency and conservation measures. Some SIDS have made innovative use of local energy sources, such as agricultural by-products and hydro-power sources, and experimental use of solar and wind power is continuing. Many AIMS SIDS have conducted studies on their renewable energy potential. However, the challenge to fully utilize natural endowments of renewable energy sources will require further exploration in areas such as ocean thermal energy conversion technologies, and will require investment, technology transfer and capacity building appropriate to SIDS. There is a need for the development of a SIDS energy agenda, and for the establishment and or strengthening of regional institutions to conduct research and to provide technical support. In this respect the establishment of a dedicated funding mechanism for the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency in SIDS is imperative, in particular in order to overcome the relatively high establishment costs of renewable

energy projects. The meeting identified a key role for the regional development banks, in particular as regards support for technology transfer.

28. Tourism is an important contributor to economic growth in SIDS. Yet the meeting recognised that the sector is open to many exogenous shocks. It also recognised that the tourism sector places demands on other sectors of the economy, such as transportation and communication, infrastructure and the employment market. Many AIMS SIDS have developed national sustainable tourism development plans. There is a continuing challenge to establish the appropriate balance between tourism development and that of other sectors of the economy, while protecting carrying capacity. SIDS have established limits to the scope of further tourism development in view of the importance of economic diversification and stability. Sustainable tourism policy development and implementation efforts should be enhanced, and may require technical and financial support from the development partners, such as the provision of support to training institutions.

29. It is recognized that there is great potential for the development of ecotourism in SIDS. Ecotourism can assist SIDS in protecting and conserving natural resources and biodiversity, and can contribute to the implementation of national biodiversity action plans. Ecotourism should form an integral part of national tourism development plans. The meeting therefore concluded that it is imperative that AIMS SIDS be assisted in developing the management tools and mechanisms appropriate to their national circumstances, and that ecotourism in SIDS be given the necessary international recognition for its contribution. Any action plans on ecotourism at the international level must give special recognition to the circumstances and challenges of SIDS.

30. The meeting emphasized the need to enhance the stability and resilience of the AIMS SIDS through even deeper efforts towards economic diversification and integrated planning. To this end the AIMS SIDS highlighted the scope for further development of marine resources, the expansion of tourism, ICT and other service sectors, and the exploration of the potential of cultural enterprise.

31. The meeting highlighted the unique cultures of the AIMS region which present opportunities for cultural tourism. As this is mostly an untapped source, this should also be incorporated in the national tourism development plans.

32. All AIMS SIDS have ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity, and have initiated national biodiversity strategic action plans and developed national nature reserves and protected areas. Challenges remain in the development of capacity and in public education and awareness, to ensure that there is widest appreciation of the importance of conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity. Appropriate protocols and regulations must also be established to ensure that bio-piracy is discouraged and prevented, and that research carried out in the AIMS region is made available for the benefit of the communities.

33. The meeting recorded the commitment of AIMS SIDS to developing institutional capacity through the adoption of appropriate national policies and legislation. It was acknowledged that for the most part, institutional capacity in most AIMS SIDS is weak, and this impacts on their ability to implement international agreements, and on their ability to influence the development of those agreements. This was found a significant challenge particularly as regards effective participation in deliberations dealing with the development of the WTO rules and agreements and on the potential impact of their implementation in SIDS. The meeting underscored the importance of further support from the international community for capacity building in the AIMS region, in order to fulfil their commitments in this regard. Delegations welcomed the initiative by UN DESA and UWICED to develop a process for strengthening the negotiating skills of SIDS prior to the International Meeting in Mauritius.

34. Regional cooperation among SIDS has been recognized as an important tool for the promotion of sustainable development. However, for most AIMS SIDS this cooperation has been limited, mainly because of geographic dispersion and lack of capacity in the region. The meeting decided that there was a need for a regional support mechanism. In the absence of an existing appropriate regional institution, it was agreed that the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) would be designated the interim regional mechanism for the AIMS region to facilitate and coordinate the preparatory process leading up to the International Meeting in Mauritius, subject to the approval of its Governing Council. The meeting also recognised that, in order for the IOC to carry out these tasks, it was essential that it be strengthened. The meeting therefore called on international community to assist with financial resources in this regard. It was also agreed that ongoing work toward identifying and evaluating existing capacities for the ultimate establishment a dedicated regional mechanism should continue.

35. The establishment of the Singapore Environment Institute was acknowledged as a newly created structured mechanism for inter-SIDS cooperation that did not exist prior to the Barbados Conference. The SEI reiterated its commitment to such cooperation, and invited partnerships with supporting organizations and countries to further develop this initiative. The meeting welcomed this important initiative from the Singapore Government, and encouraged all SIDS to take full advantage of this opportunity, inviting collaboration with the international community.

36. Transport and communication are continuing preoccupations for the AIMS region, particularly for the archipelagic SIDS. Many AIMS SIDS face constraints in other productive sectors due to inadequate international and domestic transport facilities and services. The meeting acknowledged the effort being made to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is maintained and expanded. In the field of ICT many AIMS SIDS have committed to fully incorporate these technologies in the productive infrastructure of their economies and for government services. Nevertheless there remain serious gaps in coverage and accessibility for the general population. The meeting therefore urged the international community to support the AIMS SIDS in this area.

37. SIDSNet was recognized for the valuable service it has provided. The meeting however acknowledged that it requires much strengthening and further enhancement, in particularly as regards development of the French language portal. It also concluded that the AIMS SIDS would provide their recommendations for improving the services of SIDSNet, and agreed to make greater effort at regularly updating their national information disseminated through SIDSNet. It was also recommended that there be closer cooperation between SIDSNet and the UNESCO initiative Small Island Voice, to ensure a comprehensive and coherent approach to information gathering and dissemination on SIDS issues.

38. The meeting underscored the importance of science and technology development to the pursuit of effective sustainable development strategy. It noted that some AIMS SIDS have been able to strengthen the science and technology base of their economy. The need for improved science and technology research and technology transfer appropriate for SIDS was acknowledged. This was considered an area in which cooperation among the AIMS SIDS could be of great benefit. The experience of other SIDS regions was also considered relevant.

39. Many AIMS SIDS have taken steps to overcome human resource constraints, through the improvement of education and training. A major priority for the AIMS SIDS is the establishment of a sound foundation for human resource development, appropriate to local circumstances and requirements. Some AIMS SIDS have improved their teacher to student ratios as well as the levels of school attendance. Inadequate financial resources for investment in education remain a significant challenge to improving literacy levels and HRD. Another major challenge highlighted was the difficulty encountered in retaining skilled personnel in the region. The meeting agreed that greater efforts will be required to ensure that adequate opportunities are created to encourage the retention of indigenous skilled personnel. It also considered that the establishment of a SIDS roster of experts or skills bank could assist in the retention of skilled personnel. In this regard, the international community was encouraged to support such efforts through the provision of financial and technical resources. The meeting also called on the international community to utilize SIDS expertise in project implementation, particularly for SIDS related projects.

New and emerging issues

40. The meeting recognised security in all its aspects as an issue of increasing importance for the AIMS region. Recent events have highlighted the vulnerability of the most productive sectors of the region's economies. This has been exacerbated by the international obligations mandated to address these new security concerns. All countries have obligations under Security Council resolution 1373. The meeting noted that meeting these obligations created particular difficulties for all SIDS, particularly those with large coastal areas and the archipelagic SIDS.

41. The emergence of highly communicable and vector borne diseases has impacted both the social and economic welfare of the AIMS SIDS. While the successful containment of these diseases has improved the resilience of SIDS, there is scope for further work on containment through the strengthening of health infrastructure and services, thereby strengthening resilience through integrated planning. In this regard the meeting underscored the need for the increased involvement of and cooperation among tertiary and research institutions in SIDS.

42. The meeting recognized that the International Meeting presented an opportunity for SIDS to advocate special treatment for these countries on grounds of structural disadvantages and vulnerabilities. Two modalities of special treatment were deemed particularly important to AIMS SIDS: (i) the need to preserve preferential market access and give special consideration to the challenges faced by SIDS in trade negotiations; and (ii) the need to give special importance to the economic vulnerability criterion in the methodology for reviewing the list of least developed countries, among which, all potential graduation cases are SIDS. The meeting held the strong view that the consideration of Cape Verde and Maldives for graduation should be made in this perspective.

43. The meeting affirmed that the case regarding the economic and environmental vulnerability of SIDS has been made decisively. It was agreed that there is need to identify and develop policies that build SIDS' resilience, thereby redressing vulnerability comprehensively. This includes the need to diversify economies and address security concerns.

44. The AIMS SIDS reaffirmed their commitment to good governance as a means for achieving sustainable development and for building resilience.

45. It was recognized that while the primary responsibility for sustainable development rests with the national authorities of SIDS, the BPOA stresses the need for international partnership and support. The AIMS SIDS therefore called for fulfilment that international commitment to ensure that the BPOA is fully implemented. This will require support for:

- Public awareness programs on sustainable development;
- Integration of sustainable development principles in all aspects of national development strategies;
- Integrated decision making for sustainable development;
- Improvement of data collection systems to monitor progress in sustainable development;
- Mobilization of resources;
- Coordination mechanisms for delivery on stated goals; and
- Coherent coordinated implementation of MEAs on sustainable development.

The meeting called for the strengthening of international support structures that assist SIDS in:

- Forging strategic alliances to overcome size constraints;
- Capacity-building;
- Developing competitiveness strategies ;
- Promoting stability in the macroeconomic environment ;
- Diversification;
- Reducing dependence on imported energy;
- Developing capacity in the management of marine resources;
- The use of information technology;
- Education,
- Re-insurance schemes for SIDS;
- Tapping expertise from migrant overseas communities; and
- SIDS - SIDS cooperation.

46. The meeting acknowledged that AIMS SIDS have continuing difficulties with the disbursement procedures relating to multilateral assistance. In addition the reporting requirements of major funding mechanisms can be quite onerous for AIMS SIDS. The meeting called for the streamlining of procedures to take account of the special situation of SIDS.

Type II Partnerships

47. The meeting heard three presentations on Type II Partnerships in the AIMS region (SIDS Unit, Singapore Environment Institute, University of the West Indies Center for Environment and Development). However, it was noted that there was not a significant number of such initiatives developed in the region. As partnership was also an important means of implementation of sustainable development programs the meeting urged that more such initiatives be developed and invited potential partners to consider projects in the AIMS region.

Issues for the preparatory process

48. Given that all the National Assessment Reports have not been completed, the meeting reaffirmed the need to complete this process as quickly as possible. It was also agreed that the IOC, in cooperation with the AOSIS Chairman, would coordinate the development of a draft AIMS regional position on the basis of the National Assessment Reports. National Assessment Reports should be finalized by the end of October 2003, in order to enable the draft AIMS regional position to be completed and submitted by the end of November 2003. The meeting recognized the value of convening a special workshop to further develop that regional position and to prepare the final draft, and requested the international community to support that workshop.

49. The meeting decided that the structure of the draft AIMS regional position, as contained in the appendix to this report, would include separate reporting on all the chapters of the BPOA, including new and emerging issues such as security in all its aspects. The draft AIMS regional position will be an important element in the Inter-regional Preparatory Meeting in the Bahamas in January 2004, as it will contribute to the formulation of an AOSIS negotiating position.

50. The meeting underscored the importance of civil society participation in the International Meeting, including in the national preparatory process. The need to mobilize additional financial support for preparation for the International Meeting was also highlighted. The meeting agreed that all avenues available should be utilized for the mobilization of international opinion in support of the sustainable development of SIDS, and to ensure the widest possible participation in the International Meeting.

51. The meeting requested that the Government of Cape Verde, as Chair of the meeting, ensure that this report is circulated as an official UN document as part of the preparatory process for the International Meeting.

Appendix

TEMPLATE FOR AIMS REGIONAL POSITION FOR BPOA+10

Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Seas Islands

1. SOCIO ECONOMIC CONTEXT: Key characteristics, challenges and responses. • ***Key Characteristics:*** - **Key Challenges:** • ***Key Responses:***
2. NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (SD) IN THE REGION
3. PROGRESS MADE & PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BPOA: Sectoral and Cross-Sectoral Areas
3.1 SECTORAL AREAS: Progress Made and Problems Encountered
3.1.1 Climate Change and Sea-Level Rise
3.1.2 Natural and Environmental Disasters
3.1.3 Management of wastes **3.1.4 Coastal and Marine Resources** **3.1.5 Freshwater resources**
3.1.6 Land Resources
3.1.7 Energy resources
3.1.8 Tourism resources
3.1.9 Biodiversity resources
3.1.10 National institutions and administrative capacity **3.1.11 Regional institutions and technical cooperation** **3.1.12 Transport and communication** **3.1.13 Science and technology** **3.1.14 Human resource development** **3.1.15 Implementation, monitoring and review**
3.2 CROSS-SECTORAL AREAS
3.2.1 Financing and Investment for SD

3.2.2 Capacity building and Coordination
4. TRADE, INVESTMENT, CAPACITY BUILDING AND COOPERATION AND THE STATUS OF SIDS VULNERABILITY
5. MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDG's) AND SD IN SIDS.
5.1 Poverty Eradication
5.2 Education and reduction of child mortality
5.3 Gender equality and empowerment of women
5.4 HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
5.5 Environmental Sustainability
5.6 Global Partnership for Development
6. EMERGING CONCERNS AND SPECIAL NEEDS